



Massachusetts Gaming Commission gets offer from community colleges to help train casino workers

Published: Tuesday, October 02, 2012, 8:15 PM Updated: Tuesday, October 02, 2012, 9:18 PM



By **Lori Stabile, The Republican**

HOLYOKE – As the region prepares for the building of a resort casino, two members of the **state Gaming Commission** heard from **Holyoke Community College** representatives on the importance of preparing the workforce to work at the facility, and from the Pioneer Valley Building Trades Council on the need to make sure the construction jobs are kept local.

William Messner, Holyoke Community College president, unveiled a “draft” plan, in which the gaming commission would enter into a memorandum of understanding with the state Community College System Casino Career Training Institute to prepare workers.

The institute, comprised of various community colleges and workforce development agencies, would work with the commission to design an estimated \$9 million workforce program. This would include recruitment and screening of potential casino employees, as well as provide career counseling, training and job placement for all licensed positions.

How to fund the program is still being worked out, the officials told the commissioners.

“It’s not going to be inexpensive,” Messner told the commissioners.



Enlarge

John Suchocki, The Republican

Robert LaPage, of Holyoke Community College, makes a point during Tuesday's meeting with Massachusetts Gaming Commissioners.

Casino Commissioners in Holyoke gallery (8 photos)

Jeffrey P. Hayden, Holyoke Community College's vice president of business and community services, later said the money could come from the state or federal government, or possibly through direct payments by individuals enrolled in the programs, or the casinos themselves.

Messner estimated that there will be a statewide pool of at least 30,000 applicants for the 10,000 employees that the casinos will hire.

"It's going to take an investment on someone's part to put that into place," Messner said.

Robert LePage, Interim Director of Foundation and Alumni Services at Springfield Technical Community College, said the community colleges would be responsible for training potential employees. The draft plan lists the amount of hours needed to become a dealer - with craps needing the most training at 160 hours.

Hayden said Holyoke Community College has an agreement in place to buy Atlantic Cape Community College in New Jersey's casino training curriculum, so it can prepare residents for gaming jobs.

Hayden expects the curriculum to be available next year, before the single Western Massachusetts casino license is awarded in 2014. Companies competing for the license include Mohegan Sun, which wants to build in Palmer, and Ameristar Casinos, Penn National Gaming and MGM Resorts International, all of which are looking at Springfield for their projects.

The state gaming law also calls for two other casinos elsewhere in Massachusetts, and a slot parlor.

Hayden told the commissioners that "we need to grow the pool" of potential employees.

"We need to get folks who are unemployed and underemployed," Hayden said.

Messner said it is their hope to come before the commission with a finalized draft in a month or two, with more details about funding. At that time, he said the commission could make a determination on the recommendations.

"This is very exciting; it's creative and comprehensive," Gaming Commissioner James F. McHugh said about the draft plan.

Jason Garand, business manager for Carpenters Local 108 of the New England Regional Council of Carpenters, said he represents more than 900 craftsmen and women in the 101 cities and towns of Western Massachusetts.

"This will be the largest single project in the history of this area by potentially fourfold," Garand said.

Garand said that to date, the Baystate Medical Center "Hospital of the Future" project was historically the largest at \$300 million, but pointed to MGM, which wants to build an \$800 million project in Springfield's south end.

"The manpower exists right here. Skilled tradesmen and women are ready to go to work but they need the Gaming Commission to set minimum requirements that ensure a percentage of the workforce comes from the host and

surrounding communities," Garand said.

Garand wants the Gaming Commission to consider setting a minimum percentage of 50 percent local workers on the project; he said Baystate used 25 percent.

Gaming Commissioner Bruce Stebbins, of Springfield, also attended the meeting, which was advertised as an "informal, information gathering session;" the three other commissioners were at a gaming conference in Las Vegas.

© 2012 masslive.com. All rights reserved.